

## PREFACE

*'... the play, I remember, pleas'd not the million,  
'twas caviary to the general.'*

Hamlet's speech to the players, act 2, scene 2.

Sturgeons are an ancient group of animals, and are among the most valuable commercial fishes. Unfortunately, nowadays sturgeons the world over are greatly depleted in numbers due to overfishing, damming of rivers, and pollution.

The current scientific and technical interest in sturgeons is evident, and several meetings and books testify to this concern. Some highlights of this recent interest are the 'First International Symposium on Sturgeon' held in Bordeaux (France) in 1989, the 'International Symposium on Sturgeons' in Moscow in 1993, the 'International Conference on Sturgeon Biodiversity and Conservation' in New York City in 1994, and the '3rd International Symposium on Sturgeon' in Piacenza (Italy) in 1997. This series of meetings will continue at the next '4th International Symposium on Sturgeon' to be held in Oshkosh, Wisconsin (USA) in 2001.

The Atlantic sturgeon *Acipenser sturio* L., 1758 was formerly a commercially important species, both for its flesh and for its ripe eggs (caviar), but due to a combination of factors it is becoming increasingly uncommon. Consequently, the Atlantic sturgeon is today a rare fish; the world population of *A. sturio* is so depleted that this species is threatened with extinction. The 2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species considers it 'Critically Endangered - CR A2d', and it has been placed on the lists of endangered species by several European countries. The Atlantic sturgeon is also protected by international conventions, e.g. Washington, Bern, Bonn, Barcelona, and by the Habitats Directive of the European Union.

In July 1994 'The Society to Save the Sturgeon *Acipenser sturio* L. (*Gesellschaft zur Rettung des Störs Acipenser sturio* L.)' was founded at the Senckenberg Institute in Frankfurt. The main goals of the Society are to unite researchers and private groups involved in *A. sturio* conservation, and to develop an international collaborative effort to save this species. The Society has held annual meetings and developed several projects in its area of concern.

The international 'Symposium on Conservation of the Atlantic Sturgeon *Acipenser sturio* in Europe' held in September 6-11, 1999 in Madrid and Seville, was organised by the Department of Animal Biology I of Madrid's Complutense University and the Society to Save the Sturgeon. More than forty delegates from France, Germany, Greece, Hungary,

Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine and the USA attended and contributed to the scientific discussions during the Symposium's sessions.

The main objectives of the Symposium were to bring together those concerned with or working on conservation of *A. sturio*, and to produce a book of proceedings, including an overview of the present knowledge on the subject. It is our pleasure to now present this volume of proceedings, sponsored by the Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO, Spanish Institute of Oceanography), including 26 peer-reviewed articles. This collection of papers offers a valuable summary of the state of the art at the end of the 20th century.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the participants in the international 'Symposium on Conservation of the Atlantic Sturgeon *Acipenser sturio* in Europe', and to the authors, referees and editors of this volume of proceedings, with special thanks to all of the Symposium's sponsors.

**Benigno Elvira, Symposium Convener and Contributing Editor**